

## American Communal Societies Quarterly

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Volume 4 | Number 1

Pages 3-19

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January 2010

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## **Strangers Along the Trail: Peoria's Shaker Apostates Enter the World**

*By Patricia L. Goitein*

**In the 1830s**, Peoria became the home of a remarkable group of immigrants whose origins were unknown to their contemporaries and overlooked by historians for nearly 150 years. They were Shaker apostates, political and religious refugees from the utopian settlement of Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, a Shaker community noted for members' communal ownership of property, dedication to altruistic labor, and the Shaker faith that demanded strict celibacy. The apostates' lives cover two periods: first, at Pleasant Hill, where their dedication to an ideal of religious and social perfection demanded that they abandon worldly ties and family bonds; and second, in "the World," which called for just the opposite. Their struggles and success in both realms are remarkable and testify both to the force and success of altruistic communal initiatives and centralized power as well as the countervailing force of bonds of marriage and family, democratic decision making, and private ownership of property.

Peoria's first Shaker apostate, Charles Ballance, arrived in Peoria, Illinois, from Kentucky in December 1831, alone, cold, and lonely. He expressed his feelings in a poem dated 1832:

Kentucky! I thy wandering son still roam  
Far from that land I once could call home;  
My steed moves on, submissive to my will-  
Although a slave to me, he loves me still.  
Except this noble beast, I'm all alone,  
Weary and cold, and here might freeze unknown.<sup>1</sup>

Ballance had been expelled from the Shaker community at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, on March 14, 1829.<sup>2</sup> In 1831, after reading law and briefly teaching school in Kentucky, he relocated permanently to Peoria.<sup>3</sup> He chose his site carefully, first traveling extensively in Indiana and Illinois, visiting other former Shakers, and evaluating frontier land and prospects.<sup>4</sup> Illinois' rich Military Tract, 3,500,000 acres of land lying between the Illinois and Mississippi rivers, was being settled, and like other early settlers, Ballance

saw that fortunes were going to be made in land sales by those who were on the ground early. Peoria, a small but growing town on the Illinois River, was the gateway to the northern half of the Military Tract, and Ballance soon established himself here as a lawyer, real estate broker and land speculator of consequence.<sup>5</sup>

Ballance's first effort in Illinois was to "gather in" a "family" of Shaker apostates for personal as well as business reasons. He wrote to former Pleasant Hill Shakers, extolling Peoria, and urging them to relocate, or at least invest in land in Illinois. On December 24, 1831, he wrote to fellow apostate Abram Fite, inviting him to come to Illinois, saying, "I have visited the best parts of Indiana and Illinois, and have resolved to settle at Peoria, the site of the old Fort Clark.... This is, I have no doubt, the richest country on earth." He goes on to describe various money-making opportunities for ambitious settlers. Reflecting on his accommodations, Ballance says, "The entertainment in this country is so bad, that a man who would keep a good house could hardly fail of making money very fast." He urged Abram to show the letter to other apostates, saying, "Whether it would suit you or not to come to this country, I am sure that it would suit Mr. Lineback. If he wished to make brooms, shoes, or cooper ware, the market would be much better here than in Kentucky. Besides, if he is still fond of fishing, he might catch as many in an hour in the Illinois as in a day in the Kentucky. If you think proper to invest your money in land in this state, I will attend to selecting a piece for you, with pleasure."<sup>6</sup> As Francis Voris and other apostates answered his letters and expressed interest in coming to Illinois, Ballance toured the country with them, showing them properties, and helping them to settle.<sup>7</sup>

At least twenty-four Pleasant Hill apostates settled in and near Peoria or elsewhere in Illinois, and all of them had ties to Charles Ballance. By the mid-1830s, Ballance was joined by his sister Prudence, and by the Voris family, the Lineback family, the Congletons, the Gass family, and Thomas and William Bryant.<sup>8</sup> All of the apostates were refugees from Pleasant Hill or the orphaned children of related apostates. Apostate Abram Fite settled in Wabash County, Illinois. William Lineback joined relatives in Illinois after first settling in Iowa. Benjamin Gass settled in Morgan County, Illinois, while his parents and sister settled in Peoria. William Bryant, Thomas' brother, also settled in Illinois. The Vorises were later joined in Peoria by Patsey Voris' grand-nephew and niece, Henry and Martha Baldwin, children of apostates Tyler Baldwin and Jeretta Banta.<sup>9 10</sup>

Illinois Shaker apostates were members of the founding families of the Pleasant Hill community. Fired by the Kentucky Revival that swept through the Ohio River Valley between 1800 and 1805, and believing that the “end of days” was upon them, these families had embraced Shakerism, and dedicated their lives to cleansing themselves of sin and preparing themselves and their children for salvation. In 1806, they began to separate themselves from “the World” and build a community of Believers on Shawnee Run, later called Pleasant Hill or Shakertown, in Mercer County, Kentucky.<sup>11</sup> After their separation from “the World,” the family and personal lives of these early Believers were increasingly regulated by emerging Pleasant Hill mores as well as the lead Ministry of the Society in New Lebanon, New York.<sup>12</sup>

The future apostates entered Pleasant Hill between 1806 and 1812 as part of large intergenerational and extended families, often with friends and neighbors in tow. Many of them, like the Ballances, lived in primitive half-faced camps in the woods along Shawnee Run until communal dwellings were built. Francis Voris entered Pleasant Hill in 1810 with his parents, John Voris Sr. and Rachael Montfort; eight siblings; his maternal uncle, Francis Montfort, his wife Sarah, and their six children; and his uncle, Jacob Voris. Pleasant Hill was begun on Patsy Thomas Voris’ homeplace, a 140-acre farm donated to the Shakers by her father, Elisha Thomas, in 1806. The Thomases’ neighbors, Samuel and Henry Banta and their families, were also early Shakers, joining the Society of Believers and donating their land and funds to the new community.<sup>13</sup> In 1814, 128 Believers at Pleasant Hill, among them all of Peoria’s future apostates who were of legal age, signed a covenant which required final, irrevocable surrender of private property and full personal dedication to the Society of Believers known as Shakers.<sup>14 15</sup>

Pleasant Hill’s first Shakers were upstanding members of Kentucky frontier communities. They were hardened frontiersmen and represented families that had survived savage warfare during and after the American Revolution. In 1806, Pleasant Hill was situated in a recently cleared Kentucky wilderness, and it is probable that many of these early families entered the community not only for religious reasons, but also for the physical and material security that group living offered them. James Gass’s family came to Kentucky with Daniel Boone and had survived the siege of Boonesborough. James Gass was born at Boonesborough in 1779,<sup>16</sup> and his sister, Jenny Gass, was scalped and killed by Indians<sup>17</sup> at Estill’s Station

in 1782. John Gass, James's brother, bluntly summed up those early and violent times when years later, he described the tortured and mutilated body of fellow frontiersman Col. Richard Callaway as "the worst barbequed man I ever saw."<sup>18</sup>

Upon entering Pleasant Hill, the families were split, and individuals were encouraged to discard their blood ties and to create new bonds with fellow Believers.<sup>19</sup> The community was organized into semi-autonomous Shaker "families" of unrelated adults living celibate lives in separate men's and women's quarters. Willis and Joanna Ballance, Charles's parents, were enthusiastic converts, and set to work founding the East Family, building Pleasant Hill facilities and planting orchards. Their new lifestyle was strict and increasingly regulated as the new Shaker families developed and the community emerged from the wilderness. One former Shaker later wrote:

Not a single aspect of life, whether spiritual or temporal, from the initiative of confession, or cleansing the habitation of Christ, to that of dressing the right side first, stepping first with the right foot



A contemporary picture of the East Family dwelling,  
Pleasant Hill Shaker Village, Kentucky.

as you ascend a flight of stairs, folding the hands with the right-hand thumb and fingers above those of the left, kneeling and rising again with the right leg first, and harnessing first the right-hand beast, but that has a rule for its perfect and strict performance.<sup>20</sup>

Special note should be taken of Peoria's future apostates who were raised at Pleasant Hill during these formative years. In 1806, the children lived with their parents, and after communal dwellings were built, they lived with their mothers in the women's quarters. Finally, in the fall of 1809, the children were gathered into a School Family, and housed in separate accommodations in the schoolhouse itself.<sup>21</sup> Several of Peoria's apostates, including Charles and Prudence Ballance, Mason Gass, Patsey Thomas Voris, Hortensia Voris, and Thomas Bryant, were raised in the School Family.

Children raised in the School Family would have had only the vaguest memory of family life and society outside the confines of Pleasant Hill. Their ties with their biological families were not broken, because they lived with their cousins and siblings. Charles Ballance, however, felt abandoned by his father and stepmother, Willis and Joanna, and as an adult frequently described himself as an orphan. Nevertheless, he was devoted to his youngest sister, Prudence, who had been raised from early childhood in the School Family. Moreover, Ballance formed strong sibling relationships with Thomas Bryant<sup>22</sup> and Martha "Patsy" Thomas,<sup>23</sup> bonds which lasted for the rest of their lives. It would appear, therefore, that children raised in Pleasant Hill's School Family maintained many of their biological family ties, while at the same time forming new "kinship" bonds with others in their Shaker family. Both their biological and Shaker family bonds later became important factors in the children's apostasy and adjustment to "the World."

Pleasant Hill children raised during this formative period received thorough manual training, but a very limited academic education. In 1827, while still at Pleasant Hill, Ballance wrote, "I have no education, only what I have obtained under the most disadvantageous circumstances."<sup>24</sup> As with their parents, the children's lives were dominated by work and worship.<sup>25</sup> They attended classes three months a year, and were taught reading writing and simple math. By the time he reached adulthood, however, Ballance was likely to have known as many as seven or eight different trades, and his sisters were equally well trained. After they left Pleasant Hill, work continued to dominate the Peoria apostates' lives. Ballance's motto was

“Never waste a minute,” a lesson that he learned well at Pleasant Hill.<sup>26</sup> When writing Francis Voris’ obituary, Ballance remarked that his friend “[had] long been a drudge to business, but to his active mind, business was one of his chief enjoyments.”<sup>27</sup>

**By the late 1820s,** Pleasant Hill was a wealthy community with a population of approximately 490 Believers. Its members were skilled and tireless workers, and they had built a diversified agricultural and light industrial community out of the Kentucky wilderness. The Society owned approximately 3,000 acres of land and their assets included a grist mill, a fulling mill, a saw mill, a tan yard, ferries, a stone quarry, a public tavern for travelers, and fine brick, stone, and frame buildings, all built by the residents themselves. They sold a wide variety of goods and services, including seeds, herbs and herbal medicines, and milled grains. They dyed fabrics, not only for their own use, but commercially as well. They constructed flatboats and transported their exports to nearby communities as well as to St. Louis and New Orleans.<sup>28 29 30</sup>

Peoria’s future Shaker apostates played an important role in Pleasant Hill’s success. Several were trustees, business agents, deacons, and family leaders. In 1812, James Gass became a trustee and was appointed to transact the Society’s external business. Like subsequent trustees, including future apostate Francis Voris, Gass became a salesman for Shaker products and a purchasing agent for goods which the order had to buy. In 1816, Francis Voris and Abram Fite departed on the first of several long voyages by flatboat to St. Louis and New Orleans.<sup>31</sup> In 1824, Voris signed an invoice for Shaker products shipped to Selma, Alabama, and Herculaneum, Missouri. The inventory included carpeting, linseed oil, cedar ware, large and small brooms, blue grass seed, baskets, hats, sugar boxes and carpenter’s gauges—all quality products made at Pleasant Hill.<sup>32</sup>

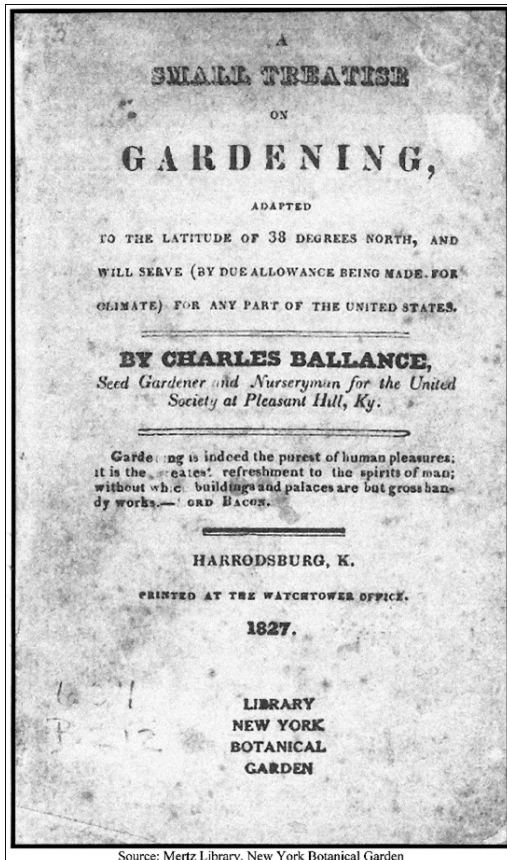
When he was twenty-seven years old, Charles Ballance wrote and published *A Small Treatise on Gardening by Charles Ballance, Seed Gardener and Nurseryman for the United Society at Pleasant Hill, Ky.* The treatise is one of the earliest professional gardening books written specifically by and for Western farmers. Ballance tells his readers something of himself and his life at Pleasant Hill in the preface: “Having been a practical Gardener for twelve years in this place, the reader may be assured that the instructions are adapted to this climate.” He further adds, “As I have no education, only what I have obtained under the most disadvantageous circumstances,



and have trusted entirely to my own ability in preparing the manuscript, a display of literature will not be expected. C. B. Pleasant Hill, November 28, 1827.”<sup>33</sup>

Even as Ballance was writing his gardening treatise, the strong bonds of community and cooperation that held Pleasant Hill together were crumbling. The problems lay not only with a restless and resentful rising generation, as exemplified by Ballance, but also with disillusioned older residents who had brought their children into Pleasant Hill.<sup>34</sup> The Shaker leadership quickly identified Elder (and future Peorian) James Gass, as “one of the principal heads of the party of infidelity and opposition,”<sup>35</sup> after Gass, Tyler Baldwin and others openly criticized the absolute authority of the Shaker hierarchy and demanded changes in the Shaker rules that closely regulated every aspect of their lives.<sup>36</sup> The dissidents threatened dissolution

of the Pleasant Hill Society and the disbursement of its assets unless their demands were met. Gass was thwarted in his reform efforts and was expelled from the community on January 28, 1828; Baldwin departed February 19, 1829.<sup>37</sup> Some surviving parents, including James Gass, who had led their children into Pleasant Hill, were now leading them back into “the World.” By late 1828, forty-two pioneer members of Pleasant Hill had departed and entered “the World,” and legal suits entered by Gass, Samuel Banta and others attempting to recover their property and funds were beginning to accumulate in Kentucky courts.



Source: Mertz Library, New York Botanical Garden



Pleasant Hill trustee and future apostate Francis Voris managed the Shaker community's internal affairs and organized its legal defense during this period. In a letter to the Central Ministry in Mt. Lebanon, New York, dated May 13, 1827, Voris clearly shows irritation with the lawsuits and the disharmony. He describes apostate Samuel Banta as:

An old man, who believed in the first opening in this country, and who then brought in considerable money and property, say to the amount of three or four thousand dollars, and who in the year 1814 signed the Church covenant, has turned off. He now claims his money and property to remove away again, disregarding his having entered into the Covenant, and once dedicating his property to the use of the gospel. The old man is greatly strengthened by other apostates, who are urging him on; as also are two of his own children in "the World", who hold a respectable standing in point of Character, as well as one of them having considerable property. This together with his age, and grey head, and former good character in "the World", forms altogether an imposing appearance. And added to this, they are endeavoring to make it an electioneering hobby on which his council wishes to ride into the state Legislature<sup>38</sup>

As Voris noted, many of the early apostates did not remove far from Pleasant Hill while their lawsuits were pending in Kentucky courts. Some apostates, among them Charles Ballance and James Gass, plagued the Pleasant Hill community by raiding their stock, secretly communicating with residents and encouraging them to leave, and inciting public enmity against the Society in nearby Danville and Harrodsburg.<sup>39</sup> Ballance, who had always been a "troublesome child" for the Shakers, sold a horse belonging to the Society in order to discharge a debt that he had acquired in "the World."<sup>40</sup> He was formally expelled from the Pleasant Hill community March 14, 1829.<sup>41</sup> Ballance settled his law suits against the Shakers out of court in 1831, and received a payment of \$340.<sup>42</sup>

In 1834, James Gass, Samuel Banta and the other litigants lost their lawsuits when the validity of the 1814 Pleasant Hill covenant was upheld in the Kentucky Court of Appeals.<sup>43</sup> Shaker elders, desperate to be rid of the recalcitrant former Believers, voluntarily paid the apostates \$13,000 to resettle elsewhere, preferably as far away from Pleasant Hill as possible.<sup>44</sup> Several apostates, including James Gass and his family, used their share of the funds to buy property or businesses in or near Peoria and quickly

established new lives for themselves.

Unlike Shaker apostates such as Mary Dyer, who spent years denouncing them,<sup>45</sup> Peoria's apostates did not continue to publicly berate the Shakers. After their legal suits against the Society were settled and the initial shock of entry into "the World" had been met, they set to reordering their new lives with energy and purpose.

Social adjustment to "the World" could not have been easy for the Shaker apostates. They had been isolated from American society for over twenty years, and those who had been raised at Pleasant Hill knew only the Shaker way of living. They had lived with a regimen of rules and customs that firmly attached them to the Shaker community, while it sharply differentiated them from non-Shakers in appearance, mannerisms, and religious practices.<sup>46</sup> Apostate women would have resembled the Shaker women that Harriett Martineau described as being "averse to the open air and exercise," "pallid and spiritless," with a "soulless stare."<sup>47</sup> They were a very quiet people, walking softly, closing doors softly, and speaking in quiet voices. They were not skilled at small talk, and they worked constantly. Some apostates maintained Shaker mannerisms and values for the rest of their lives. In his loving tribute to her, Charles Ballance described Patsy Thomas Voris as being "quiet, unobtrusive, seldom from home, and was known to but few.... She carefully every day did all the good she could, and refrained from everything hurtful to anyone.... She made no ostentation of her charity, but by many poor and afflicted, her name will always be held in sweet remembrance.... She never spent a day in idleness when able to arise from her bed."<sup>48</sup>

Ballance alluded to his own social awkwardness and loneliness upon entering "the World" in the following excerpt from an undated poem in his Scrapbook titled "Reasons for not signing album":

"But I, alas, without a friend or dime,  
Was cast an orphan on the sea of time  
To sink or swim, or boldly force my way,  
Where thousands disappear beneath the spray.  
I've had no time to learn the art to please,  
Nor means to live in fashionable ease,  
I've been a drudge to business twenty years;  
I'm growing old, as from my hair appears,  
And am, as I would think, the last of men,  
To please just such a lady with my pen."<sup>49</sup>

Pleasant Hill Shakers, being strictly celibate, had developed an elaborate set of rules and customs to ensure that celibacy would be maintained. Communication between the men and women was strictly supervised, and even winking or blinking at each other was forbidden. Yet within the confines of this repressed sexual environment, love and nature apparently found a way to flourish. Love seems to have drawn restless young people out of the community. Several of the apostates married each other within days or weeks of leaving the community and soon started families of their own. Abram Fite, age forty-six, left Pleasant Hill on June 3, 1831,<sup>50</sup> and married Anna Reed, another apostate, on August 19, 1831, two days after she left Pleasant Hill.<sup>51</sup> According to United States census records, Abram ultimately married twice and had ten children. Francis Voris left Pleasant Hill on August 25, 1829 and married Patsey (Martha) Thomas shortly after she left the Shakers in October of the same year.<sup>52</sup> Most of the apostates married other apostates. Of the twenty-six former Shakers known to have been living in Illinois in later years, only three (Charles Ballance, James G. Lineback, and Hortensia Voris) are known to have married out of the tight circle of former Shakers.

Most of the apostates were related to each other and several family groups left Pleasant Hill during this period of upheaval. While they did not leave together on a single day, one member followed the other out of the community until the entire family had entered “the World.” James and Abby Gass entered Pleasant Hill with their children, and one by one, the entire family left the community. The Voris and Ballance families split, some remaining at Pleasant Hill, while others left. Francis Voris left with his brothers Abram, Samuel, David, Henry, James Jr., and sister Hortensia, but his parents and two brothers remained loyal Shakers. Charles Ballance brought his sister Prudence out of Pleasant Hill, but his stepmother Joanna, two brothers, and one sister remained behind.<sup>53</sup> Both the Vorises<sup>54</sup> and Charles Ballance<sup>55</sup> reestablished contact with family members who had not converted to Shakerism.

Communal living, including communal ownership of property, was a part of the apostates’ Shaker life. Members of the extended apostate Voris family lived together for the rest of their lives, closely replicating their Pleasant Hill experience. Charles and Julia Ballance were close friends and neighbors of the Vorises for many years, and Julia later remembered them fondly:

Mr. Ballance came from Kentucky to Peoria in 1831 and soon afterward induced his friends, the Voris' [*sic*], to join him here. The family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Francis Voris, two younger brothers, Abram and Sam, a sister, Hortensia, and Miss Sarah Congleton.... Mr. Abram Voris went down the river as supercargo of a line of flat-boats, and while in the neighborhood of Natchez took the cholera and died. A year or two later, Mr. Samuel Voris married Miss Congleton and for more than a quarter of a century the two brothers, Francis and Samuel, with their families lived together in the homestead in perfect accord. As children grew to maturity and were married, additions would be made to the original house, but so long as the first couples remained, there was no thought of separation. As time went on, they prospered and for years were considered among the wealthiest as well as the most hospitable people in the county.<sup>56</sup>

Like many immigrant groups, the apostates formed a closely-knit informal community that was held together by ties of kinship, friendship, financial and business interests. All of them used their Shaker skills and associations to build new lives in Peoria, and they took an active part in building their adopted community, much as they and their parents had built Pleasant Hill.

The Voris brothers reopened their business links with St. Louis and New Orleans, helping to establish a commercial link with the South that dominated the Peoria economy prior to the Civil War.<sup>57</sup> The family subsequently had numerous successful business interests including a foundry, artesian wells, and Illinois' first telegraphic line.<sup>58</sup>

Charles Ballance was an early Peoria lawyer, land speculator and surveyor. He surveyed the City of Peoria in 1832 and 1834,<sup>59</sup> and Ballance, the Voris family, and Thomas Bryant all developed additions to the city of Peoria.<sup>60</sup> Charles Ballance and Isaac G. Lineback owned and operated a ferry.<sup>61</sup> Lineback was also a tailor and owned a general clothing store.<sup>62</sup> Ballance maintained his interests in horticulture and both he and Shaker apostate Jacob Lineback were early members of the Peoria Agricultural Society. Ballance was elected vice-president of that society in 1841, and was a judge that year at the society's first annual cattle show and fair.<sup>63</sup> In 1846, Lineback and one Elijah Capps "sent some of the best fruit from their orchards, the whole presenting a horticultural exhibition doubtless

never before equaled in the far west.”<sup>64</sup> Ballance frequently contributed articles, opinion pieces and poems to local newspapers, and in 1870 published a well-regarded history of Peoria.

Mason Gass and his wife, Prudence Ballance, managed Peoria’s first resort hotel, the Prospect Hill Pavilion. The resort was located on the bluff overlooking the Illinois River valley and commanded an impressive view of Lake Peoria. S. Dewitt Drown described the hotel in his *Almanac* for 1851: “The building is a substantial frame of 76 feet with wings extending back 52 feet, and has one of the finest ballrooms in the State. It is kept in good style by Mr. Mason Gass, who, with his ‘better half’ know well how to get up the ‘creature comforts of the inner man.’ Here, too, the weary traveler can take his rest, (for it is situated on the direct road from Peoria to Galena,) and here those disposed, can ‘trip the light fantastic too,’ and ‘go home with the girls in the morning.’”<sup>65</sup> Later, Thomas Bryant, who married Prudence after Mason Gass’ death, owned a vineyard below the hill along the Galena Road, where he and his nephew, James Congleton, made wine in large quantities. Samuel Voris was one of Bryant’s financial backers.<sup>66</sup>

The Shaker apostates’ informal community remained hidden within the larger Peoria society, and there is no evidence that their contemporaries were aware of their past associations with Pleasant Hill and Shakerism. The apostates’ hidden past is all the more remarkable because Charles Ballance, Francis Voris, John Congleton, Thomas Bryant, and Voris’ grand-nephew Henry Baldwin were all elected to various public offices over a period of thirty-five years, and their backgrounds would have been scrutinized. Ballance provided an interesting personal history for publication when he ran for office<sup>67</sup>, and he wrote affectionate obituaries for Francis and Patsy Voris, admitting to their Kentucky origins, but neither Pleasant Hill nor the Shakers was ever alluded to. Ballance was elected mayor of Peoria in 1856 and served as city alderman for several years. Henry Baldwin was elected mayor in 1866. Francis Voris was elected to the Illinois State House of Representatives in 1836, appointed director of the State Bank of Illinois in 1838, and elected Peoria town trustee in 1842. Thomas Bryant was sheriff of Peoria County, 1835-40, and judge of Probate Court and justice of the peace, 1847-49.<sup>68</sup>

In business affairs, the apostates sometimes were silent partners in each other’s business ventures, such as the Ballance-Lineback ferry in 1835, in which Isaac G. Lineback’s participation was not publicized. Peoria County

estate records for the Ballance, Bryant, Voris and Mason Gass families reveal that these apostates kept their estate business within the former Shaker group and their children, leaving trusted confidants to put personal papers and business records in order, far from prying eyes.<sup>69</sup>

Privately, Charles and Julia Ballance were not secretive with their children about Charles' Shaker history. Their son, John Green Ballance (1853-1910), visited Pleasant Hill in 1898, where he talked with members of the settlement who had known his Shaker aunts and uncles. In a letter to his mother dated June 27, 1898, John wrote, "There is no question, from all the information that I could obtain, that [David] Amos Ballance (the Shakers called him Amos) was a great man, and if he had had opportunities in "the World," would have been a very distinguished man. His name is very much revered in the village by the old people, and tears came into the eyes of Sister Jane and others of the old ladies when his name was mentioned."<sup>70</sup>

Published accounts of Charles Ballance's life, however, continued to carefully conceal his Shaker heritage. Ballance's son-in-law, historian James Rice, omits Charles' Shaker history when he describes Ballance's childhood as follows: "Charles Ballance was a young child when his mother died. The father afterward married again, and the boy seems to have grown toward manhood without much guidance or control aside from his own strong sense of right."<sup>71</sup> Twentieth-century Peoria historian, Earnest East, published "Journal of Charles Ballance" in the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* in April 1937. East had obtained the original document from Ballance granddaughter, Carolyn Rice (daughter of historian James and Eliza Ballance Rice), and published an entry in which Charles states, "Since the above date, I took my sister Prudence from Pleasant Hill to Mr. John Green's where she resides." East, however, does not identify Pleasant Hill as a Shaker community, nor does he inform the reader that Charles and Prudence Ballance had been Shakers.

Aaron Oakford learned that the Voris brothers had a Shaker connection, and his account is recorded in an unpublished manuscript at the Peoria Public Library. Oakford states that the Voris brothers "were the sons of Samuel Van der Voris, a Hollander, who came to America in 1754. Some years later the father worked his way to Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, where he established a settlement of Shakers. He was a leader of standing in the community. Characteristic of the Kentucky gentleman, he possessed considerable pride which his children inherited."<sup>72</sup> The later details of the

Shaker connection are incorrect. According to Pleasant Hill records, the Voris brothers' father was John Voris, who was born in 1758 in Middlesex County, New Jersey, and was one of the early Kentucky Believers. He died at Pleasant Hill in 1845, a devout and respected Shaker.<sup>73</sup>

Charles Ballance's Shaker history remained a family secret until 1993, when the Ballance family held a reunion in Peoria, and family historian, Brig. General Robert G. Ballance, reported to the Peoria *Journal Star* that "Grandfather took a dim view of the Shakers, and they ran him out of the colony."<sup>74</sup> No further mention was made of Charles' Shaker history, and the comment was overlooked by younger family members and local historians alike.

## **Conclusion**

The frontier has always been a place where people could reinvent themselves and begin their lives anew. One usually thinks of individuals in this regard, and occasionally families, but rarely an entire group. After Pleasant Hill fell short of their utopian ideal, Peoria's Shaker apostates reinvented themselves on the Illinois frontier, successfully shedding and hiding their controversial past associations, while they established themselves as prominent members of the Peoria community.

They had been industrious, zealous community builders at Pleasant Hill, and they were industrious and zealous community builders in Peoria. It was Shaker apostate Francis Voris who dug the very foundations for the first Peoria County Court House in 1834 and superintended the construction project. Using skills learned at Pleasant Hill, Peoria's Shaker apostates helped to build a new, more democratic community on the Illinois frontier, where their families prospered and the rising generation could look forward to an expanding future.



## Notes

1. Ballance Scrapbook, untitled poem, undated clipping from *Peoria Register and Northwestern Gazetteer*, manuscript collection, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Ill. [Many pages in this scrapbook are unnumbered. If no page number is given, it is an unnumbered page.]
2. Pleasant Hill Resident database, unpublished, Pleasant Hill Archives, compiled by Larrie Curry, Pleasant Hill, Ky.
3. "Another Old Citizen Gone," Obituary for Charles Ballance, *Peoria Daily Transcript*, August 12, 1871, 1.
4. "The Journal of Charles Ballance," edited by Ernest East, *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 30, no. 1 (April 1937): 70-84.
5. Calvin Theodore Pease, *The Frontier State, 1818-1848* (Chicago, 1919), 173-75; and "Another Old Citizen Gone," 1.
6. Ballance Scrapbook.
7. Charles Ballance, *History of Peoria* (Peoria, 1870), 211.
8. Pleasant Hill Resident database.
9. United States Census, 1840, 1850, 1860.
10. Peoria County estate and land records, Peoria County Courthouse, Peoria, Ill.
11. Thomas D. Clark and F. Gerald Ham, *Pleasant Hill and Its Shakers* (Harrodsburg, Ky.: Pleasant Hill Press, 1968), 2-6, 9.
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